

34 Forming questions

If a statement uses “be” or an auxiliary verb, its question form is made by inverting that verb and the subject. Any other question is formed by adding “do” or “does.”

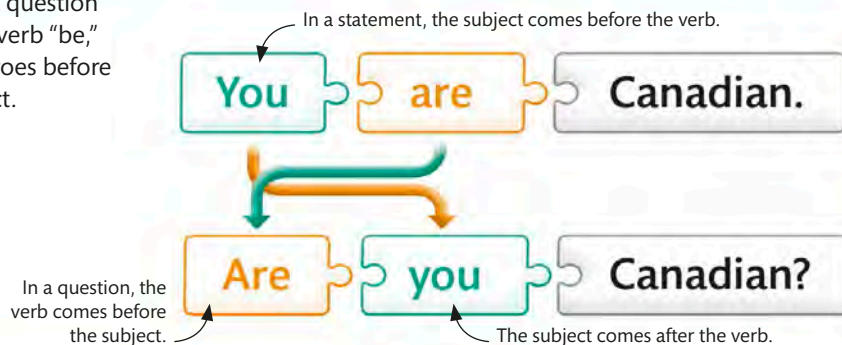
See also:

Present simple 1 Types of verbs 49

Modal verbs 56

34.1 QUESTIONS WITH “BE”

To make a question using the verb “be,” the verb goes before the subject.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

Sorry, **am** I early?



Are you tired?



Are they engineers?



Is Frieda here yet?



Is she still a student?



Aren't you bored?

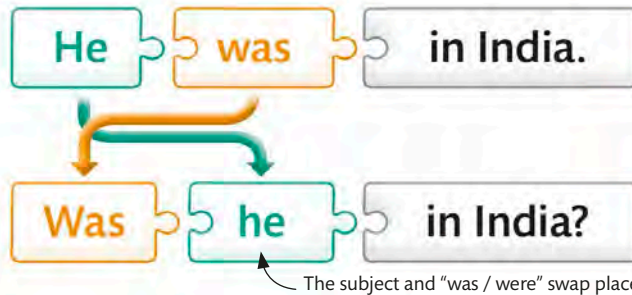


HOW TO FORM

“BE”	SUBJECT	REST OF SENTENCE
Am	I	Canadian?
Are	you / we / they	
Is	he / she / it	

34.2 QUESTIONS WITH "BE" IN THE PAST

To ask questions about the past using the verb "be," the subject and verb swap places.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

Was it nice and sunny yesterday?



Were there any snacks at the party?



Was he good at playing tennis?

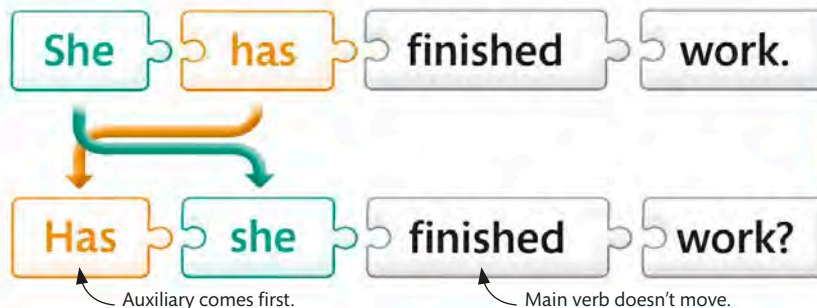


Were you at the party last night?



34.3 QUESTIONS WITH AUXILIARY VERBS

For questions including an auxiliary verb, such as "have," "will," and "could," the subject and the auxiliary verb swap places. The main verb stays where it is.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

Could you tell me where the stadium is, please?



Have they decided when they're going to get married yet?



If a question has more than one auxiliary verb, only the first one moves.

Should we have called ahead before coming?

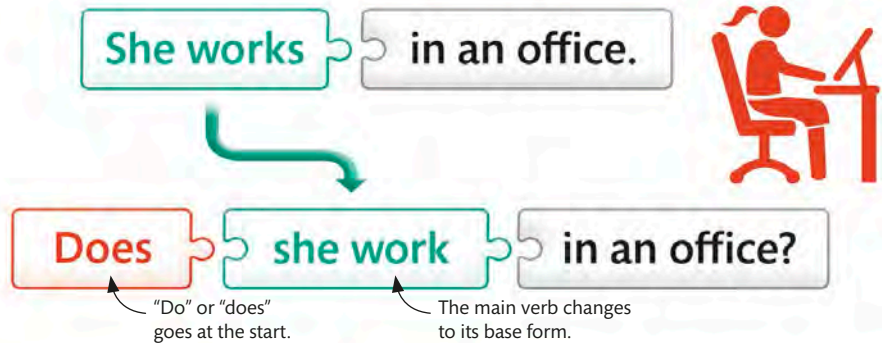


Will you have finished that report by tomorrow?



34.4 QUESTIONS WITH "DO" AND "DOES"

Questions in the present simple without the verb "be" or an auxiliary verb start with "do" or "does" and have the main verb in its base form. The subject and main verb do not swap around.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

Do they live in Paris?



Does he get up very early every morning?



Do you speak English?



Does your father work on a farm?



Do I know you?



Does she still play the piano?



Don't you have any vegetarian food on the menu?



Doesn't this office have air conditioning?

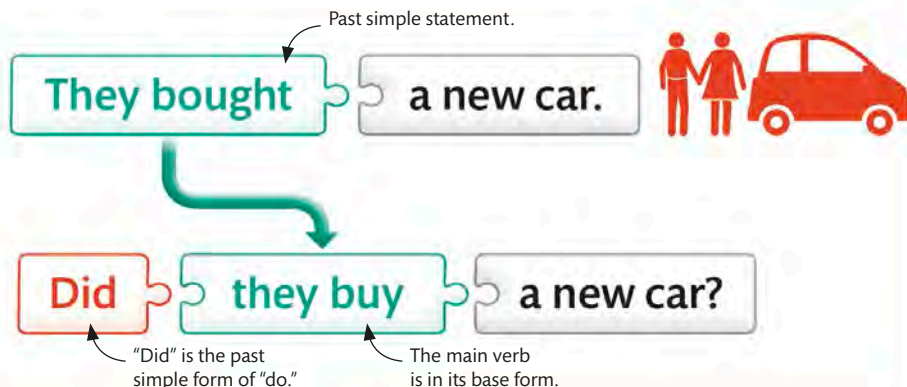


HOW TO FORM

"DO / DOES"	SUBJECT	BASE FORM OF VERB	REST OF SENTENCE
Do	I / you / we / they	work	in an office?
Does	he / she / it	work	in an office?

34.5 QUESTIONS WITH "DID"

Questions in the past simple without the verb "be" or an auxiliary verb start with "did" and have the main verb in its base form. The subject and main verb do not swap places.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

Did they have a good time?



Did she meet her friends in town?



Did you read a book on the beach?



Did he go to the gym?



Did I tell you the good news?



Did Jack just get fired?



Did you swim in the sea?



Didn't we meet at the conference last year in Paris?



COMMON MISTAKES BASE FORMS IN QUESTIONS WITH "DO"

When questions are formed with the auxiliary verb "do," the main verb must be in the base form.

Does she work in a school? ✓

Did they buy a new car? ✓

Does she works in a school? ✗

Did they bought a new car? ✗

35 Question words

Open questions are questions that do not have simple “yes” or “no” answers. In English, they are formed by using question words.

See also:

Forming questions **34**

Prepositions of time **107**

35.1 QUESTION WORDS

There are nine common question words in English.

What is used to ask questions about things.

What is the time?



When is used to ask questions about time.

When is dinner?



Why is used to ask for reasons.

Why are you mad?



Where is used to ask about places or directions.

Where is the café?



Who is used to ask about people.

Who is Jo's teacher?



Whom is a formal version of “who,” that can only be used as an object of a question.

Whom did you give the package to?



How is used to ask about a condition, or the way something is done.

How are you?



How can also be used with an adjective or an adverb to ask about the degree to which the adjective applies.

How busy is she?



Which is used to ask someone to specify between two or more named things.

Which car is yours?



Whose is used to ask who is the owner of something.

Whose cat is this?



35.2 "WHAT / WHICH"

"What" is used when the question is general. "Which" is used when there are two or more possibilities in the question.

There are no choices in the question.

What is the tallest building in the world?



The question includes a choice of possible answers.

Which building is taller, Big Ben **or** the Eiffel Tower?



FURTHER EXAMPLES

What is the highest mountain in the Alps?



Which mountain is higher, the Matterhorn or Mont Blanc?



What sort of food do you like?



Which do you prefer, the red skirt or the blue skirt?



35.3 "HOW OFTEN" AND "WHEN"

"How often" is used to ask about the frequency with which someone does an activity.

"When" is used to ask about the specific time that they do something.

"How often" asks about frequency.

How often do you go on vacation?



I usually go on vacation once a year.

"When" asks about the specific time something happens.

When do you go running?



I go on Thursday nights.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

How often do you go to the beach?



Not very often.

When do you go to the gym?



On Tuesdays and Fridays.

36 Open questions

Open questions can't be answered with "yes" or "no."
They are formed differently depending on the
main verb of the question.

See also:

Present simple 1 Question words 35

Verbs 49

36.1 OPEN QUESTIONS WITH "BE"

If the main verb of the sentence is "be," the question word goes at the beginning of the question and the form of "be" goes straight after it.

My name is Sarah.
What is your name?

"Be" comes after
the question word.

The question is "open"
because it can't be
answered "yes" or "no."



FURTHER EXAMPLES

What is Ruby's job?



How was the concert?



Where were you last night?



Why are we all here?



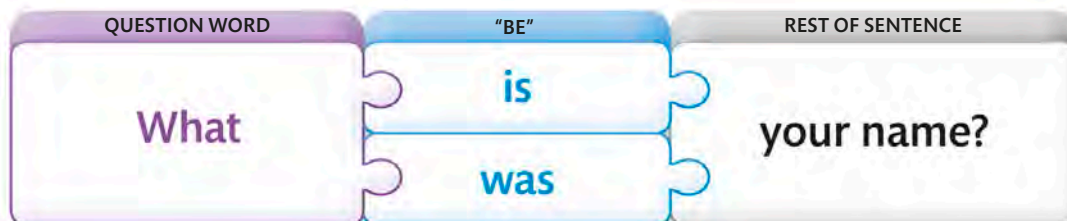
What is this thing?



Why aren't you at school?



HOW TO FORM



36.2 OPEN QUESTIONS WITH OTHER VERBS

For all questions except those formed with "be," the question word is followed by an auxiliary verb. If there is already an auxiliary verb in the sentence, it is also used in the question. If there is no auxiliary verb, a form of "do" is added.

Who should I call?

This auxiliary verb is already in the sentence, so it stays in the question.



When do you eat lunch?

Auxiliary "do" follows the question word.

The question word goes at the beginning.

The main verb changes to its base form.



HOW TO FORM

QUESTION WORD	AUXILIARY VERB	SUBJECT	MAIN VERB
When	do	you	eat lunch?
	did		
	should		

FURTHER EXAMPLES

Where do you go swimming?



Where could he have gone?



What does she do on the weekend?



How did this happen?



Which car do you drive to work?



Who can speak English here?



When does he finish work?



What should I do now?



Why did you stay up so late?



When did you get a cat?



37 Object and subject questions

There are two kinds of question: object questions and subject questions. They are formed in different ways and are used to ask about different things.

See also:

Present simple 1 Types of verbs 49

Verbs with objects 53

37.1 OBJECT QUESTIONS

Use object questions to ask who received an action, not who did the action. They are called object questions because the question word is the object of the main verb.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

What did he eat?

He ate steak and salad.

Who did you speak to?

I spoke to Jane.

HOW TO FORM

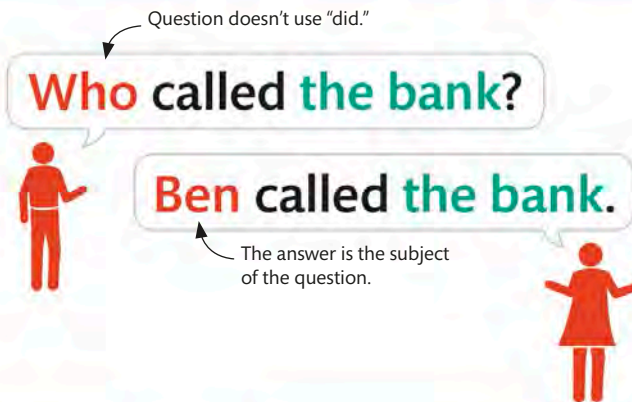


Different question words can be used here.

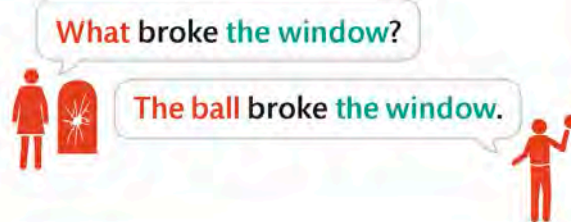
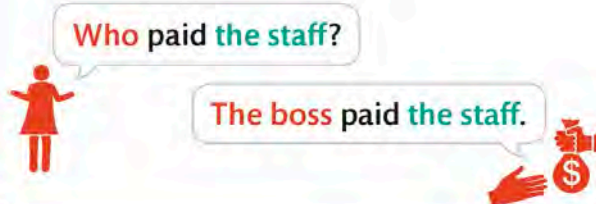
The auxiliary tells you whether the question is talking about the past or the present.

37.2 SUBJECT QUESTIONS

Subject questions are used to ask who did an action. They are called subject questions because the question word is the subject of the main verb. They do not use the auxiliary verb "do."

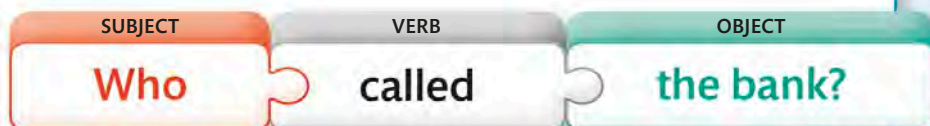


FURTHER EXAMPLES



HOW TO FORM

"Who" and "what" are the most common pronouns used in subject questions.

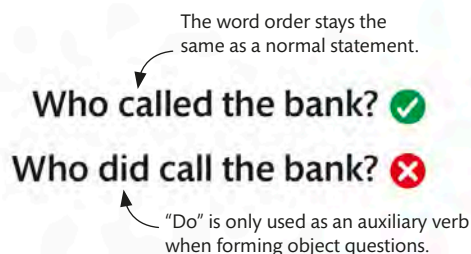


! COMMON MISTAKES OBJECT AND SUBJECT QUESTIONS

Object questions must use a form of the auxiliary "do."



Subject questions do not use an auxiliary verb and the word order stays the same as in a normal statement.



38 Indirect questions

Indirect questions are more polite than direct questions. They are very common in formal spoken English, particularly when asking for information.

See also:

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Types of verbs 49

38.1 INDIRECT OPEN QUESTIONS

Indirect questions often start with a polite opening phrase. After the question word, the word order in indirect questions is the same as in positive statements.



Indirect questions start with an opening phrase.



Where **is** the station?

Do you know
Could you tell me } where **the station is**?

The verb comes after the subject.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

Do you know how much **the tickets will cost**?



Could you tell me why **you were** late?

Could you tell me what time **the stores close**?

Indirect questions leave out the auxiliary verb "do."



HOW TO FORM

OPENING PHRASE

Do you know

Could you tell me

QUESTION WORD

where

SUBJECT

the station

VERB

is?

A polite opening phrase comes first.

38.2 INDIRECT CLOSED QUESTIONS

Indirect closed questions are formed using "if" or "whether."
In this context, "if" and "whether" mean the same thing.



Could you tell me { if whether } it is raining outside?

Polite opening phrase

The subject comes before the verb.

Is it raining outside?



FURTHER EXAMPLES



Do you know if that restaurant is expensive?



Could you tell me whether the train is on time?

HOW TO FORM

OPENING PHRASE

"IF / WHETHER"

SUBJECT

VERB

REST OF SENTENCE

Do you know

if

it

is

raining outside?

A polite opening phrase comes first.



COMMON MISTAKES WORD ORDER WITH INDIRECT QUESTIONS

When a question has an opening phrase, the word order in indirect questions is the same as in a statement. There is no inversion, and "do" is not added.

Could you tell me where the station is? ✓

Could you tell me where is the station? ✗

Could you tell me when you close? ✓

Could you tell me when do you close? ✗

39 Question tags

In spoken English, small questions are often added to the ends of sentences. These are called question tags, and they are most often used to invite someone to agree.

See also:

Present simple 1 Past simple 7

Types of verbs 49 Modal verbs 56

39.1 QUESTION TAGS USING "BE"

The simplest question tags use the verb "be" with a pronoun matching the subject of the sentence.

STATEMENT QUESTION TAG

The music is very loud, **isn't it?**



FURTHER EXAMPLES



You're cold, **aren't you?**



I'm late, **aren't I?**

For statements with "I," "aren't I?" is used in the negative question tag, not "amn't I?"



He was tall, **wasn't he?**



I'm not talking too much, **am I?**

TIP

Question tags are mostly used in informal situations.

HOW TO FORM

A positive statement is followed by a negative question tag, and a negative statement is followed by a positive question tag.

POSITIVE STATEMENT

The music is very loud,

Verb is positive.

NEGATIVE QUESTION TAG

isn't it?

Question tag uses negative form of verb.

NEGATIVE STATEMENT

The music **isn't** very loud,

Verb is negative.

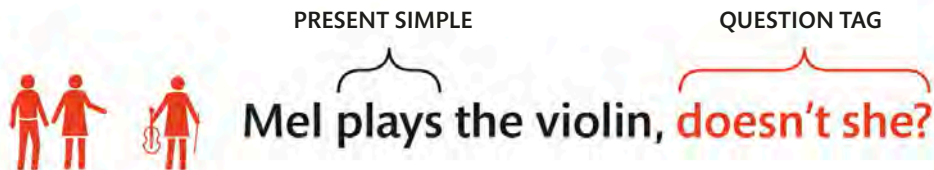
POSITIVE QUESTION TAG

is it?

Question tag uses positive form of verb.

39.2 QUESTION TAGS USING AUXILIARY VERBS

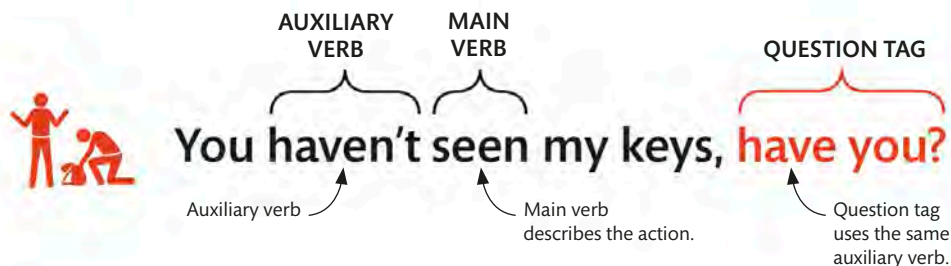
For most verbs other than "be," a present simple statement is followed by a question tag with "do" or "does."



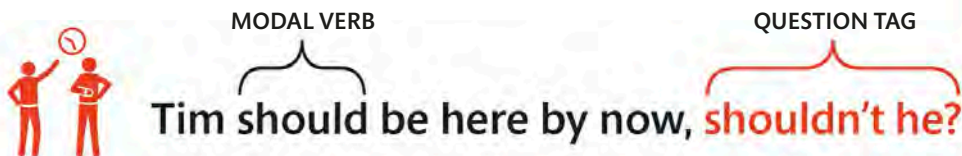
A past simple statement is followed by a question tag with "did."



A statement with an auxiliary verb is followed by a question tag with the same auxiliary verb.



Statements with modal verbs such as "could," "would," and "should" are followed by question tags that use the same modal verb.



39.3 INTONATION WITH QUESTION TAGS

If the intonation goes up at the end of the question tag, it is a question requiring an answer.

You'd like to move offices, wouldn't you?
[I am asking whether or not you would like to move offices.]

If the intonation goes down at the end of a question tag, the speaker is just inviting the listener to agree.

You've already met Evelyn, haven't you?
[I already know you've met Evelyn.]

40 Short questions

Short questions are a way of showing interest during conversation. They're used to keep conversation going, rather than to ask for new information.

See also:

Present simple 1 Forming questions 34

Types of verbs 49

40.1 SHORT QUESTIONS

Short questions must be in the same tense as the statement they're responding to. If the statement is positive, the short question should be positive and vice versa. The subject from the statement is replaced with the relevant pronoun.

It's Tom's birthday today.



Is it?

For statements using "be," the short question uses the same form of "be."

I play golf every weekend.



Do you?

For other verbs, a form of "do" is used.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

I am going to visit my parents next week.



Are you?

"I am" becomes "are you" because it is directed back at the speaker.

I went to a party last night.



Did you?

The past simple of "do" is used to match "went," which is the past simple of "go."

Rob wasn't in the office this morning.



Wasn't he?

The negative is used to match the statement.

My son studies every night.



Does he?

The third person form "does" is used to match "studies."

40.2 SHORT QUESTIONS WITH AUXILIARY VERBS

If a statement contains an auxiliary verb, including modal verbs, that auxiliary verb is repeated in the short question.

I have just come back from Hawaii.



Have you?

Here, "have" is an auxiliary verb forming the present perfect.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

I couldn't wait to come to work today.



Couldn't you?

I've been working since 7am.



Have you?

The train should be here by now.



Should it?

I can't find my car keys.



Can't you?

40.3 SHORT QUESTIONS IN US ENGLISH

In US English, short questions are sometimes not inverted.

Roger is starting a new job tomorrow.



He is?

The subject and verb are not inverted, but this is said with a rising intonation.

My team didn't win the game last night.



They didn't?

41 Short answers

When answering closed questions in English, some words can often be left out to make responses shorter. These short answers are often used in spoken English.

See also:

Present simple 1 Types of verbs 49

Modal verbs 56 "There" 85

41.1 SHORT ANSWERS

When the question uses the verb "be," "be" is used in the same tense in the short answer. When the question uses the auxiliary verb "do," "do" is used in the same tense in the short answer.

Question uses "be."

Are you a doctor?

Yes, **I am.**

No, **I'm not.**

"A doctor" doesn't need to be repeated in the answer.



Question uses "do."

Do you like coffee?

Yes, **I do.**

No, **I don't.**

"Like coffee" doesn't need to be repeated in the answer.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

Is your name Sophie?

Yes, **it is.**

Are you having fun?

Yes, **I am.**

Was the train on time?

No, **it wasn't.**

Does he live here?

Yes, **he does.**

Do you like cake?

Yes, **I do.**

Did you enjoy the play?

No, **I didn't.**

41.2 SHORT ANSWERS WITH AUXILIARY VERBS

When the question uses an auxiliary verb, including modal verbs, the same auxiliary verb is used in the short answer.

Can you ride a bicycle?



Yes, I can.



No, I can't.



FURTHER EXAMPLES



Would you like to play chess?

Yes, I would.



Should I sell my house?

Yes, you should.



Have they bought a new car?

No, they haven't.



Will he be at the party later?

No, he won't.



COMMON MISTAKES SHORT ANSWERS WITH AUXILIARY VERBS

If a question uses an auxiliary verb, including modal verbs, it must be used in the short answer. The main verb should not be used at all.

Can you ride a bicycle?



Yes, I can.



Yes, I ride.



41.3 SHORT ANSWERS WITH "THERE"

When the question uses "there," it is also used in the answer.

Is there a hotel in the town?



Yes, there is.



No, there isn't.



Short for: "No, there isn't a hotel in the town."

Are there hotels in the town?



Yes, there are.



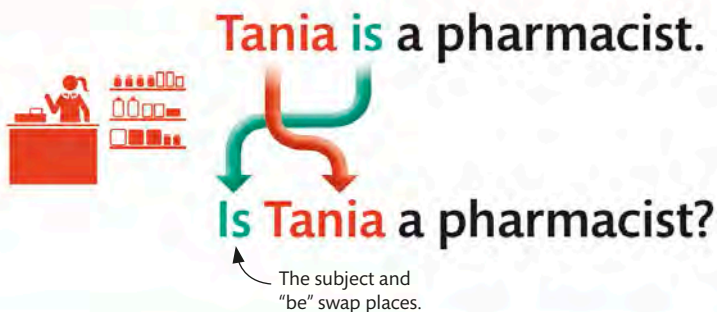
No, there aren't.



42 Questions overview

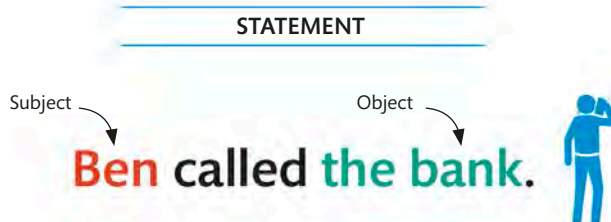
42.1 FORMING QUESTIONS

Questions in English are formed either by swapping the positions of the subject and the verb, or by using the auxiliary verb "do."

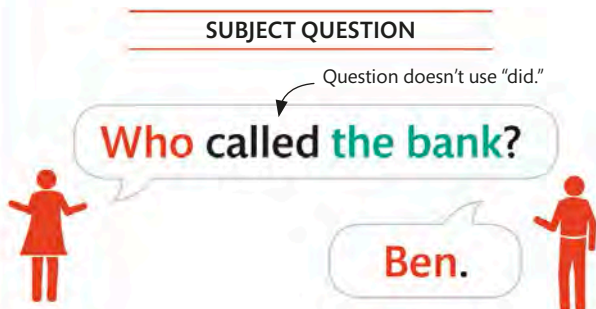


42.2 SUBJECT AND OBJECT QUESTIONS

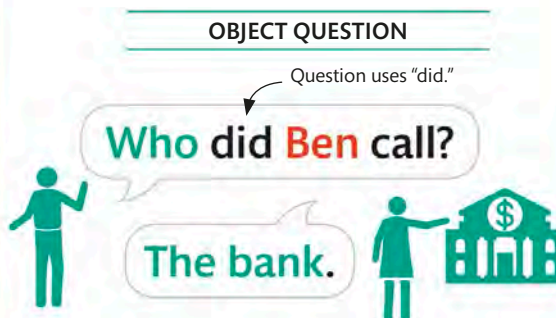
Questions in English are formed differently depending on whether they are asking who or what did an action or who or what received an action.



Subject questions ask who did an action. The question word is the subject of the main verb. They do not use the auxiliary verb "do."



Object questions ask who received an action. The question word is the object of the question. They usually use the auxiliary verb "do."

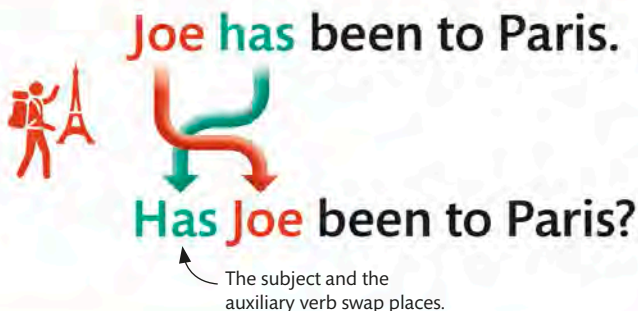


Questions in English are formed in different ways depending on the main verb. Open and closed questions are formed differently, and spoken with different intonation.

See also:

Forming questions **34** Question words **35**

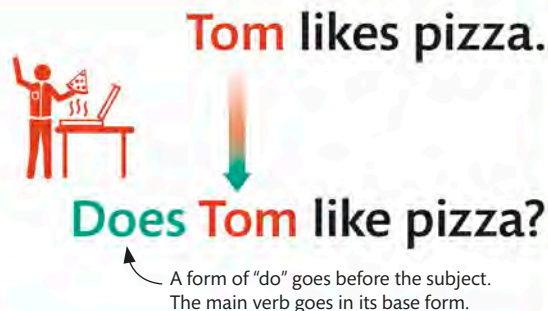
Question tags **39** Short questions **40**



Joe has been to Paris.

Has Joe been to Paris?

The subject and the auxiliary verb swap places.



Tom likes pizza.

Does Tom like pizza?

A form of "do" goes before the subject. The main verb goes in its base form.

42.3 QUESTION TAGS AND SHORT QUESTIONS

Question tags are added to the end of a question, usually to ask someone to agree with you. A positive statement is followed by a negative question tag, and vice versa.

You like skiing, **don't you?**



Short questions are used to show that someone is listening to the speaker. They are positive for positive statements and negative for negative statements.

Yes, I go skiing twice a year.



Do you?

42.4 CLOSED AND OPEN QUESTIONS

Closed questions can only be answered with "yes" or "no." When they are spoken, the voice often rises at the end of the question.

Does Stevie work in an office?

Open questions are formed by adding question words to the start of the question. They can be answered in many different ways. The tone of the speaker's voice usually falls at the end of open questions.

Where does Stevie work?

